

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

Nicodemus said, “How can anyone be born after having grown old?”

And then later in the same chapter:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

I woke up yesterday feeling pretty good about the sermon I had written—until I read the news that the United States and Israel had attacked Iran while most of America was sleeping. A couple of verses past today’s gospel, John writes, “People love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.” With my moral compass needle spinning, those words echoed in my mind.

Then I read a statement from Bishop John Taylor that helped to steady me. He wrote that in moments like this, the first and best response is prayer—especially for those most at risk: civilians, volunteers, and all who will bear the brunt of violence. He named this as a grave turning point for our country, calling it **the worst abuse of presidential power in United States history** and reminded us that those who believe in the risen Christ will have work to do. But for today, he said, all we can do is pray.

In troubling times, I am deeply grateful for this community at Trinity. Your Lenten devotions have helped steady my own compass. The vulnerability and wisdom being shared among us are no small gift.

Aubrey Toole wrote, “Sin comes from forgetting that we are simultaneously fully human and fully divine—embodiments of love, interconnected with all beings.”

Gregory Conarroe reflected, “From composting, I’ve learned that hidden in the transgression that fosters decay are the ingredients of new life.”

Andy Siegel shared, “As I ask God to create a clean heart in me, I find myself listening more and talking less; understanding more and deploying fewer opinions.”

And just yesterday, Faye Cox wrote words that feel especially poignant: “Love our enemies—seriously? Yes, because as we wake up to the new reality, there is no separation. Our neighbor—even our enemy—is not separate from us.”

That brings us to today’s gospel reading and good ole Nicodemus.

He takes Jesus literally. The word Jesus uses—*anōthen*—can mean “again” or “from above.” It is intentionally ambiguous. Nicodemus hears “again” and imagines crawling back into the womb. But John’s Gospel often shows us how Jesus’ metaphors are misunderstood. Jesus is not talking about biology. He is talking about transformation.

And two thousand years later, we are still arguing about what it means to be born again.

For some, it’s a single decision, a declaration of belief. For others, it’s tied to getting the doctrine exactly right. I grew up worried about whether I had crossed every theological “t” and dotted every spiritual “i.” I thought salvation depended on precision.

It wasn’t until I became an alcoholic that I discovered something deeper: grace is not conditional. The scandal of the cross reveals how deeply God loves us—before we clean ourselves up, before we believe correctly, before we earn anything. That love has the power to transform us from the inside out.

Transformation is not a one-time event. It takes a lifetime.

When God lifted my compulsion to drink, my sponsor reminded me: it’s not forever—it’s just for today. Almost thirty years later, it’s still one day at a time.

Being born from above is like that. It happens again and again. It is daily, sometimes hourly, sometimes moment by moment.

So what does that mean for us?

Too often, Lent becomes about giving up something small—chocolate, social media, the news cycle. But Lent is not spiritual dieting. It is an invitation to participate in

transformation. It is an invitation to let God rewire our hearts toward the kind of love revealed on the cross.

Recently, I visited St. Matthias in Clermont, Florida. The rector preached about fasting and feasting. One pairing struck me immediately:

Fast from judging others.

Feast on seeing Christ in others.

For me, that is where the rubber meets the road.

Judgment has long been one of my defense mechanisms. When I feel threatened or anxious, my mind rushes to categorize and condemn. To change that habit, I have to practice something new. I have to act as if I am already free from judgment.

Meditation helps. It gives me space to notice the swirl of thoughts without grabbing onto them. It re-centers me on what matters. If you've never tried it, Christine Purcell gathers a group on Thursdays from 3 to 4 in the chapel. It's a beautiful way to practice being born from above.

But meditation alone is not enough. I have to put what I learn into action.

When someone ruffles my feathers, can I pause? Can I soften? Can I offer an encouraging word instead of a cutting one? That small shift is a kind of rebirth. It is the Spirit nudging me toward light.

Feasting on seeing Christ in everyone—yes, everyone—is no small task in our current political climate. When I manage, even briefly, to let go of disdain toward someone whose views I oppose, I feel a surprising lightness. The heaviness in my chest loosens. Something rises in me that feels free.

Why? Because, seeing Christ in others helps me to see Christ... in me.

And sometimes, when loving my enemies feels impossible, the best I can do is see Christ in the tomb in them—and in me. The unfinished, not-yet-risen parts. The places still wrapped in grave clothes. Even that is enough for God to work with.

Being born again is not about a single declaration of belief. It is about waking up—again and again—to who we truly are and whose we are. It is about letting divine love penetrate our defenses, soften our judgments, and expand our capacity for mercy.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Maybe because he was afraid. Maybe he was curious. Maybe he was simply confused. But he came. And later in John's Gospel, we see him again—this time in daylight, helping prepare Jesus' body for burial. Something had shifted. Something had grown.

Transformation often begins in confusion and unfolds slowly.

In times like these—when news unsettles us, when moral compasses wobble, when fear rises—it is tempting to harden ourselves. But Jesus invites us into something else. Not denial. Not passivity. But rebirth. Over and over.

Born from above.

Born into courage.

Born into tenderness.

Born into love that refuses to draw hard lines between “us” and “them.”

So today, perhaps the most faithful thing we can do is pray. Pray for those in harm's way. Pray for wisdom for leaders. Pray for soft hearts within ourselves. Pray that when darkness feels overwhelming, we will choose light.

And let us lean into this Lenten journey—not as a checklist of sacrifices, but as daily participation in grace.

Because being born again is not a one-time event. It is a journey.

I close with this prayer from Ashley and Anastasia's devotion for today, March 1st:

Jesus, may you be the light we follow this Lenten season as we strive to love others. May we pursue forgiveness no matter how much we have been hurt. May we seek to serve no matter how worn out we feel. May we choose kindness in a world filled with anger and hate. Help us to show our faith not merely in words, but in love made visible through our actions. Keep us from judgment and condemnation, remembering that all are created and loved by you.

Amen!